RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Relational Exchange Mechanisms and Domestic Travel Continuity Intentions: Evidence from Thailand's Tourism Recovery Period

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines domestic travel continuity intention during Thailand's tourism recovery period through a relational exchange framework grounded in social exchange theory. Drawing on survey data from 500 domestic travelers, structural equation modeling was employed to test the relationships among travel motivation, tourist trust, tourist loyalty, and continuity intention. The findings reveal that travel motivation positively influences trust, loyalty, and continuity intention. Tourist trust strengthens loyalty and directly enhances continuity intention, while loyalty emerges as the strongest predictor of sustained domestic travel behavior. Mediation analysis confirms that loyalty partially mediates the relationship between trust and continuity intention, and that trust and loyalty sequentially mediate the relationship between motivation and continuity intention. The results reconceptualize continuity intention as a relational outcome shaped by layered exchange mechanisms rather than a purely motivational response. The study contributes to tourism recovery literature by providing a mechanism based explanation of domestic tourism resilience in post crisis environments.

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID 19 pandemic generated an unprecedented shock to global tourism systems, fundamentally transforming mobility patterns, risk perceptions, and consumer travel behavior. International arrivals declined dramatically worldwide, while domestic tourism emerged as a primary stabilizing mechanism in many destinations. Recent studies emphasize that domestic markets played a pivotal role in tourism resilience and recovery during and after the pandemic period (Volgger et al., 2021). In emerging economies such as Thailand, domestic travelers became the core demand segment sustaining tourism related businesses during the recovery phase.

While early tourism research during the pandemic concentrated on crisis impact, risk perception, and travel avoidance behavior (Aditya Gowianto, 2022; Supiandi & Habibi, 2024), more recent scholarship calls for a shift toward understanding recovery dynamics and behavioral continuity (Prayag, 2020). Tourism recovery is not merely a function of macroeconomic stimulus or mobility reopening. It also depends on relational rebuilding between travelers and service providers. From a social exchange perspective, individuals evaluate interactions through perceived benefits and costs, forming relational judgments that influence future behavioral intentions (Hien et al., 2024).

In tourism contexts, revisit intention and travel continuity are frequently conceptualized as outcomes of relational exchange processes (Nguyen Viet et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2023). Motivation represents the initiating mechanism that activates travel decision making. Contemporary tourism research distinguishes between internal psychological drivers and external situational incentives that shape destination choice (Hossain et al., 2025; Semwal & Sharma, 2024). Trust becomes particularly salient in post crisis environments, where safety, hygiene, and service reliability directly influence perceived risk reduction (Siegrist et al., 2021). Loyalty reflects a deeper relational attachment that translates into advocacy and revisit intention (Afifah et al., 2025).

Recent studies suggest that trust and loyalty function as key mediating mechanisms linking motivational drivers to behavioral continuity in tourism settings (Cardoso et al., 2022; Jalali et al.,

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2026). However, much of this evidence is derived from stable environments rather than recovery contexts. The post pandemic period introduces structural uncertainty, heightened health awareness, and shifting institutional trust, which may alter relational exchange dynamics. As Ayu Lestari et al. (2025) argues, tourism resilience must be examined through behavioral and relational mechanisms rather than solely through economic recovery indicators.

Thailand provides a compelling empirical context. Prior to the pandemic, tourism accounted for a substantial share of national GDP, with international arrivals exceeding domestic travel in revenue contribution. During recovery, government supported initiatives and safety certification programs aimed to restore traveler confidence and stimulate domestic mobility. Yet policy incentives alone do not guarantee sustained travel continuity. Relational constructs such as motivation, trust, and loyalty may explain why domestic tourists continue to choose national destinations even after the immediate crisis phase.

Accordingly, this study develops a relational pathway model grounded in social exchange theory to examine domestic travel continuity intentions during Thailand's tourism recovery period. Specifically, the study investigates how motivation enhances trust, how trust strengthens loyalty, and how loyalty ultimately drives revisit intention. By positioning revisit intention as a relational outcome embedded in exchange mechanisms, this research extends tourism recovery literature beyond descriptive crisis analysis toward a theoretically integrated behavioral explanation.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it extends social exchange theory into the domain of post crisis domestic tourism behavior. Second, it conceptualizes domestic travel continuity as a relational exchange outcome mediated by trust and loyalty. Third, it provides empirical evidence from an emerging Southeast Asian tourism economy during recovery, addressing calls for broader geographic representation in tourism behavior research (Gössling et al., 2023).

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### Core Principles of Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory posits that social behavior emerges from interactions in which individuals evaluate expected benefits relative to anticipated costs. Originally articulated by Homans and Blau, the theory emphasizes reciprocity, mutual dependence, and the development of relational commitments over repeated exchanges (Qian, 2024). In contemporary organizational and marketing scholarship, social exchange is understood as a process through which actors form enduring relationships when exchanges generate valued outcomes such as trust, fairness, and relational stability (Abarashi & Edirisingha, 2025).

Central to social exchange theory is the assumption that individuals are motivated to maximize positive outcomes while minimizing potential risks. Over time, successful exchanges produce psychological attachment, confidence in the partner, and commitment to future interaction. Conversely, perceived imbalance or risk can weaken relational bonds. Thus, exchange relationships evolve dynamically through accumulated experiences rather than isolated transactions.

Within service contexts, relational exchanges extend beyond economic transactions and incorporate symbolic and emotional dimensions. Trust becomes a stabilizing mechanism that reduces perceived vulnerability, while loyalty reflects a commitment to sustain the relationship. From this perspective, behavioral intentions such as repurchase or revisit are not merely rational choices but manifestations of accumulated relational value.

### Relational Exchange in Tourism Contexts

Tourism represents a prototypical relational exchange setting because consumption is experiential, intangible, and often characterized by uncertainty. Tourists must rely on service providers, destination management organizations, and institutional systems to deliver promised experiences. As a result,

relational mechanisms such as trust and loyalty play a decisive role in shaping behavioral intentions (So et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

Empirical tourism research consistently demonstrates that positive experiences generate affective bonds that translate into destination loyalty and revisit intention (Li et al., 2025). These processes align with social exchange principles: when travelers perceive that the benefits of their experience exceed expectations, they reciprocate through supportive behaviors such as advocacy and repeat visitation. In contrast, dissatisfaction or perceived risk undermines relational continuity.

Motivation initiates the exchange process by activating travel decision making. Trust develops as travelers evaluate service reliability and institutional credibility. Loyalty emerges as a deeper relational attachment that reflects satisfaction, value congruence, and emotional commitment. Within a social exchange framework, these constructs are not isolated variables but interconnected stages in a relational pathway that culminates in behavioral continuity.

### Social Exchange Under Conditions of Uncertainty and Recovery

The relevance of social exchange theory becomes particularly salient under conditions of uncertainty. Crisis environments heighten perceived risks and amplify the importance of relational assurances. Research conducted during and after the COVID 19 pandemic indicates that travel decisions are strongly influenced by safety perceptions, institutional trust, and confidence in service providers (Jalali et al., 2026).

In post crisis tourism recovery contexts, travelers reassess the cost benefit structure of travel. Health risks, hygiene standards, and service reliability become central evaluative criteria. Under such conditions, trust functions as a risk reduction mechanism that stabilizes exchange relationships. When destinations demonstrate consistent quality and credible safety standards, perceived costs decline and relational rewards increase.

Recent scholarship argues that tourism resilience depends not only on infrastructure recovery but also on rebuilding relational capital between tourists and destinations (Clark et al., 2026; Jaroensutasinee et al., 2025). Social exchange theory offers a structured explanation of how relational rebuilding translates into behavioral outcomes. Motivation stimulates engagement, trust mitigates perceived vulnerability, and loyalty consolidates commitment. Together, these processes support continuity intentions in uncertain environments.

### Conceptualizing Domestic Travel Continuity as a Relational Outcome

Domestic travel continuity intention refers to the sustained willingness of travelers to revisit or repeatedly engage with destinations within their own country. Rather than conceptualizing revisit intention as a purely transactional outcome, this study positions it as a relational consequence of accumulated exchange experiences.

From a social exchange perspective, continuity intention reflects the perceived equilibrium between benefits received and costs incurred across prior interactions (Seridaran et al., 2024). When travelers perceive motivational fulfillment, trustworthy service delivery, and relational satisfaction, they are more likely to reciprocate through ongoing engagement. Loyalty operates as the proximal manifestation of this relational commitment, while continuity intention represents its behavioral projection into the future.

In post crisis settings, domestic tourism provides a distinctive relational context. Cultural familiarity, institutional proximity, and shared national identity may strengthen perceived relational bonds. However, uncertainty and evolving risk perceptions may simultaneously heighten evaluative scrutiny.

Therefore, understanding domestic travel continuity requires examining how motivational drivers, trust formation, and loyalty coalesce within a social exchange framework.

By grounding revisit intention in relational exchange theory, this study advances a mechanism based explanation of domestic tourism resilience. Rather than treating continuity intention as an isolated behavioral outcome, it is conceptualized as the culmination of sequential relational processes initiated by motivation and consolidated through trust and loyalty.

### Push and Pull Motivation Revisited

Travel motivation has long been conceptualized through the push and pull framework, which distinguishes between internal psychological drivers and external destination attributes that stimulate travel behavior (Dann, 1981; Crompton, 1979). Push motivations reflect intrinsic desires such as escape, social bonding, novelty seeking, and self-development, whereas pull motivations refer to destination specific characteristics including attractions, infrastructure, safety standards, and promotional incentives.

Recent scholarship suggests that the traditional push pull dichotomy requires refinement in post pandemic contexts. Recovery phase travel decisions are shaped not only by leisure aspirations but also by heightened safety awareness, hygiene standards, and institutional credibility (Dann, 1981). Thus, pull factors increasingly include perceived health security, certification programs, and government support initiatives. Meanwhile, push factors may incorporate psychological restoration, desire for normalcy, and reconnection with social networks after prolonged mobility restrictions.

Empirical evidence indicates that push and pull motivations jointly influence revisit intention and destination loyalty, particularly in domestic tourism markets (Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Sato, Kim, Buning, and Harada, 2016). However, most studies examine these mechanisms under stable conditions. In recovery contexts, motivational structures may operate differently by interacting with risk perceptions and trust formation. Therefore, revisiting travel motivation through a relational lens becomes essential.

### Domestic Travel Motivation as the Initiator of Relational Exchange

Domestic tourism is characterized by a distinctive motivational configuration that differs from international travel. In domestic settings, intrinsic drivers such as family bonding, cultural identity reinforcement, emotional attachment to national heritage, and the desire for psychological restoration frequently exert stronger influence on travel decisions than purely hedonic motives (Kim, Woo, and Uysal, 2015). These motivations reflect personal meaning, social belonging, and identity affirmation, which are particularly salient in post crisis contexts where individuals seek reconnection and stability. Alongside intrinsic drivers, extrinsic motivations also shape domestic travel behavior during recovery phases. Promotional campaigns, pricing incentives, accessibility, and health and safety certifications function as external stimuli that reduce perceived costs and enhance perceived benefits. Government led recovery initiatives may alter travelers' cost benefit evaluations by increasing perceived value and institutional assurance (Gössling, Scott, and Hall, 2021). In post crisis environments, institutional credibility and visible safety standards become especially important in strengthening perceptions of reliability and reducing uncertainty.

Recent tourism scholarship indicates that motivational fulfillment enhances perceived value and satisfaction, which in turn foster relational outcomes such as trust and loyalty (Chou et al., 2022). When both intrinsic desires and extrinsic expectations are satisfied, travelers are more likely to perceive that the exchange has produced meaningful benefits. In domestic contexts, this process may be further reinforced by cultural familiarity and perceived psychological proximity to the destination.

From a social exchange perspective, motivation represents the initiating mechanism that activates relational engagement. Individuals enter exchanges when anticipated rewards exceed expected costs (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Travel motivation shapes these anticipated rewards by defining what travelers expect to gain from the experience. When destinations effectively respond to these motivations, travelers interpret the interaction as valuable and credible, thereby strengthening relational confidence.

Motivation may first enhance trust. When travel experiences align with motivational expectations, destinations are perceived as reliable and capable of delivering promised value. Empirical evidence shows that motivational congruence positively influences trust formation in tourism and service contexts (Thuannadee and Praneetpholkrang, 2025). In recovery environments, destinations that satisfy both emotional and safety related motivations may reduce perceived vulnerability and strengthen trust.

Motivation may also foster loyalty. Fulfillment of motivational needs generates positive affective attachment and supportive behaviors, including favorable word of mouth and destination advocacy, which are core elements of loyalty (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). When travelers perceive that their travel purposes have been meaningfully realized, they are more likely to develop commitment toward the destination.

Finally, motivation may directly influence travel continuity intention. The extent to which travel experiences satisfy psychological and functional motivations shapes future behavioral planning. Studies consistently find that motivational fulfillment predicts revisit and repurchase intentions in tourism settings (Prayag, 2020). Within a social exchange framework, when perceived rewards correspond with initial motivations, travelers reciprocate through continued engagement.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H1: Travel motivation positively influences domestic tourist trust.*
*H2: Travel motivation positively influences domestic tourist loyalty.*
*H3: Travel motivation positively influences travel continuity intention.*

### Trust as Risk Reduction and Relational Stabilizer

Trust occupies a central position in social exchange theory because it reduces perceived vulnerability and facilitates sustained relational interaction. In exchange relationships characterized by uncertainty, actors rely on trust to mitigate potential risks and to stabilize expectations about future behavior (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano et al., 2017). Within tourism and service settings, trust reflects confidence in service reliability, institutional integrity, and the consistent delivery of promised value (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Because tourism experiences are intangible and cannot be fully evaluated prior to consumption, trust becomes a decisive determinant of behavioral intention.

In tourism contexts, trust has been consistently linked to favorable relational outcomes. Travelers who perceive destinations as reliable and credible are more likely to develop positive attitudes, recommend the destination to others, and intend to revisit (Kim, Woo, and Uysal, 2015). Trust functions not merely as a cognitive belief but also as a psychological assurance that reduces uncertainty inherent in experiential consumption. As such, it forms a critical mechanism through which relational exchange is sustained over time.

The importance of trust becomes even more pronounced in post pandemic travel environments. Crisis situations amplify perceived risks associated with health, safety, and service reliability. Empirical research during and after the COVID 19 period demonstrates that perceived safety standards, hygiene practices, and institutional credibility significantly shape travel decisions (Zenker and Kock, 2020). In

recovery contexts, travelers reassess destinations based on their confidence in regulatory compliance and operational transparency. Consequently, trust operates as a risk reduction mechanism that enables individuals to re-engage in travel despite residual uncertainty.

Within a relational exchange framework, trust precedes and strengthens loyalty. When travelers repeatedly experience reliable service and consistent quality, confidence evolves into commitment. Trust fosters emotional security and perceived value congruence, which are foundational components of loyalty development (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). In tourism, this process manifests through positive word of mouth, preference over alternative destinations, and supportive behavioral intentions. Thus, trust can be conceptualized as a precursor that consolidates relational attachment.

Trust may also exert a direct influence on travel continuity intention. Beyond its indirect role through loyalty, trust can independently shape future behavioral decisions by lowering perceived risk and enhancing expected benefits. Studies in tourism and service marketing show that higher levels of trust are associated with stronger repurchase and revisit intentions (Kim et al., 2009; Chou et al., 2022). In domestic tourism recovery contexts, where travelers balance safety concerns with leisure aspirations, trust may directly determine whether individuals choose to continue traveling within the country.

Grounded in social exchange theory and supported by prior empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H4: Tourist trust positively influences tourist loyalty.*
*H5: Tourist trust positively influences travel continuity intention.*

### Loyalty as Commitment Based Relational Attachment

Loyalty represents a central outcome of sustained relational exchange and reflects a commitment to maintain a valued relationship over time. In tourism research, loyalty is commonly conceptualized through two complementary dimensions: attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty refers to psychological attachment, positive evaluation, and preference toward a destination, whereas behavioral loyalty manifests through repeat visitation and supportive actions such as positive word of mouth (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Oliver, 1999). Contemporary tourism scholarship emphasizes that both dimensions are necessary to capture the depth of relational commitment in experiential consumption contexts (So et al., 2020).

In domestic tourism settings, loyalty extends beyond transactional satisfaction and incorporates affective bonds shaped by cultural familiarity, social identity, and accumulated experiences. Repeated positive exchanges foster emotional attachment and perceived value congruence between tourists and destinations. From a social exchange perspective, loyalty emerges when exchanges consistently generate benefits that exceed costs, leading to relational stability and commitment (Cropanzano et al., 2017). In this sense, loyalty is not merely habitual repetition but a commitment based relational attachment rooted in trust and satisfaction.

Loyalty also functions as an emotional bond within relational exchange. Positive emotions derived from fulfilling travel experiences strengthen identification with the destination and enhance advocacy behaviors. Research indicates that emotionally engaged tourists are more likely to recommend destinations, defend them against criticism, and prioritize them in future travel planning (Kim, Woo, and Uysal, 2015; So et al., 2020). In recovery contexts, such emotional bonds may play an even more critical role, as they provide psychological reassurance and continuity amid broader uncertainty.

Importantly, loyalty serves as the immediate antecedent of travel continuity intention. Behavioral intentions to revisit or continue traveling are often conceptualized as direct outcomes of loyalty.

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that loyalty significantly predicts repurchase and revisit intention in tourism and service environments (Bansal, Irving, and Taylor, 2004). Within a social exchange framework, loyalty reflects the culmination of positive relational evaluations, which translate into sustained engagement behaviors.

In post crisis domestic tourism, loyalty may represent the decisive mechanism that transforms restored confidence into continued mobility. When tourists develop commitment and attachment to domestic destinations, they are more likely to maintain travel behavior despite residual uncertainty. Accordingly, loyalty is positioned as the proximal predictor of travel continuity intention in the present study.

Based on the theoretical and empirical arguments presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H6: Tourist loyalty positively influences travel continuity intention.*

## The Relational Mediation Mechanism

Social exchange theory emphasizes that relational outcomes rarely emerge through isolated direct effects. Instead, behavioral continuity is typically the result of sequential psychological processes that unfold over repeated interactions. Within tourism contexts, trust and loyalty are not independent predictors but interconnected relational mechanisms that collectively translate motivational and evaluative judgments into sustained behavioral intentions.

Loyalty can be conceptualized as a mediating construct in exchange processes. Trust reduces perceived vulnerability and stabilizes expectations about service reliability, but trust alone does not necessarily guarantee continued engagement. It is through the development of commitment and emotional attachment that trust is transformed into enduring relational support. In relationship marketing literature, loyalty frequently operates as the behavioral expression of accumulated trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Thus, loyalty represents the mechanism through which cognitive assurance evolves into committed action.

Empirical tourism research supports this mediating role. Studies demonstrate that trust enhances attitudinal attachment, which subsequently predicts revisit intention and supportive behaviors (Kim, Woo, and Uysal, 2015). From a social exchange perspective, trust establishes relational security, while loyalty reflects commitment to maintain the exchange relationship. Accordingly, travel continuity intention may be indirectly influenced by trust through its impact on loyalty.

Beyond this single mediation pathway, a broader sequential mechanism may exist. Motivation initiates engagement by shaping expected rewards. When destinations satisfy these motivations, travelers develop trust based on perceived reliability and value congruence. Trust then strengthens loyalty by reinforcing commitment and emotional attachment. Loyalty ultimately translates into travel continuity intention. This sequential pathway aligns with social exchange theory, which posits that exchanges evolve from expectation formation to confidence building and eventually to commitment (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

In post crisis domestic tourism contexts, such chain mediation may be particularly relevant. Travelers first evaluate whether destinations fulfill psychological and safety related motivations. Successful fulfillment enhances trust. Sustained trust fosters loyalty. Loyalty then becomes the proximal driver of continued domestic travel behavior. Conceptualizing the model in this manner allows continuity intention to be understood as the cumulative outcome of relational exchange stages rather than as a direct reaction to initial motivation alone.

Based on the theoretical reasoning above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H7: Loyalty mediates the relationship between trust and travel continuity intention.*
*H8: Trust and loyalty sequentially mediate the relationship between travel motivation and travel continuity intention*.

Collectively, the hypothesized relationships are integrated into a unified structural framework, and Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of this study, illustrating the proposed relational pathways linking travel motivation, trust, loyalty, and domestic travel continuity intention.
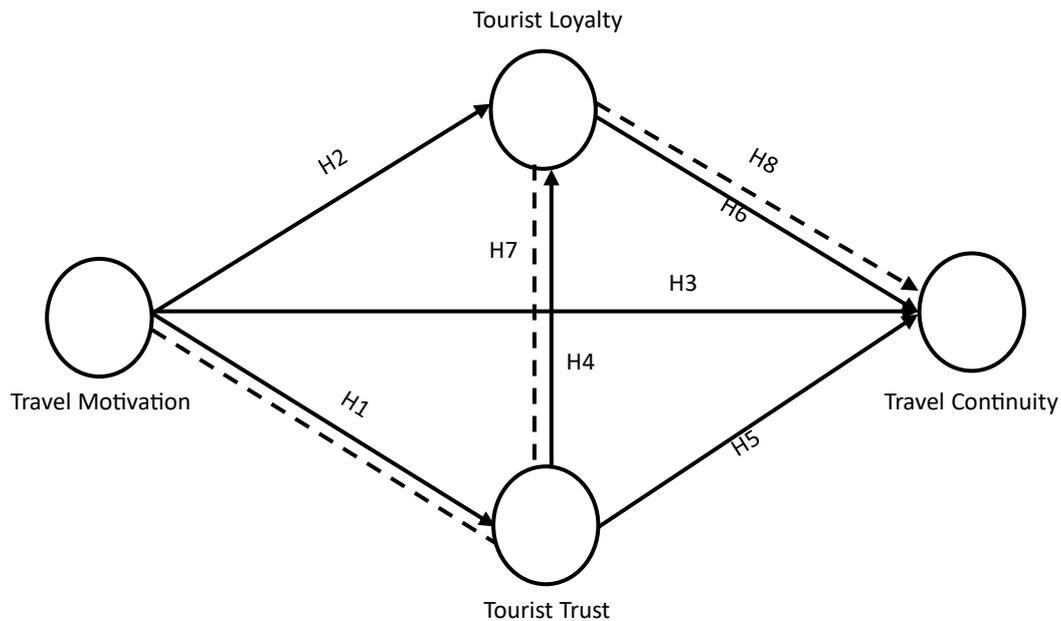


**Figure 1.** Research Framework

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design and Sampling

This study adopted a quantitative research design to empirically examine the proposed relational pathway model linking travel motivation, trust, loyalty, and domestic travel continuity intention. A cross sectional survey approach was employed, as this design is appropriate for testing structural relationships among latent constructs within behavioral research.

The target population comprised domestic tourists who had traveled within Thailand during the tourism recovery period. To ensure geographical representation and consistency with national tourism segmentation, respondents were drawn from five major regions of Thailand: Northern Thailand, Northeastern Thailand, Central Thailand, Southern Thailand, and the Greater Bangkok area. A structured sampling allocation was implemented to obtain approximately equal representation from each region.

Data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed through social media platforms and travel related networks. Prior to completing the questionnaire, respondents were screened to confirm that they were Thai residents and had recent domestic travel experience. Only eligible participants

were allowed to proceed to the full survey. After data cleaning and removal of incomplete responses, the final usable sample consisted of 500 respondents.

The sample size was deemed adequate for structural equation modeling, as prior methodological guidelines recommend a minimum sample exceeding 200 cases for models with moderate complexity and latent constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The achieved sample size therefore provided sufficient statistical power to estimate the proposed model.

### Instrument Development and Measurement

The questionnaire was developed based on established scales from prior peer reviewed tourism and marketing studies, with wording adapted to reflect the domestic tourism recovery context.

Travel motivation was measured using items capturing both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers, including social bonding, personal restoration, perceived safety, and institutional support. The scale was adapted from established tourism motivation literature (Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Li et al., 2022).

Tourist trust was measured using items reflecting confidence in destination reliability, service quality consistency, and perceived safety assurance. The measurement items were adapted from relationship marketing and tourism trust literature (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Tourist loyalty was operationalized through attitudinal commitment and advocacy intentions, including preference, recommendation intention, and positive word of mouth. The scale was adapted from prior tourism loyalty research (Oliver, 1999; Kim et al., 2015).

Travel continuity intention was measured as the intention to revisit and continue traveling domestically in the future. Items were adapted from repurchase and revisit intention literature (Hellier et al., 2003; Prayag, 2020).

All constructs were measured using a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 representing strongly disagree to 5 representing strongly agree. Higher scores indicated stronger agreement with the statements.

Before full distribution, the questionnaire was reviewed by academic experts in tourism and marketing to ensure content validity and clarity. A pilot test with a small group of domestic travelers was conducted to refine wording and confirm reliability.

### Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling. The analysis followed a two stage approach. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess reliability and validity. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach alpha and composite reliability. Convergent validity was assessed through factor loadings and average variance extracted. Discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the square root of average variance extracted with inter construct correlations.

Second, the structural model was tested to examine the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships. Model fit was assessed using multiple goodness of fit indices, including chi square statistic, comparative fit index, Tucker Lewis index, root mean square error of approximation, and standardized root mean square residual, following commonly accepted thresholds in structural modeling research (Hair et al., 2019).

To test mediation effects, indirect paths were examined using bootstrapping procedures with bias corrected confidence intervals. This approach allows more robust estimation of indirect effects compared to traditional causal step methods.

**Ethical Considerations**

Participation in the study was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. No personally identifiable information was collected. The study adhered to standard research ethics guidelines for survey based behavioral research.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Respondent Profile

A total of 500 valid responses were included in the final analysis. The sample provides a broad representation of domestic travelers across demographic and geographic categories in Thailand during the tourism recovery period.

**Table 1.** Respondent Demographic Characteristics (N = 500)

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 218 | 43.6 |
| | Female | 282 | 56.4 |
| Marital Status | Single | 340 | 68.0 |
| | Married | 135 | 27.0 |
| | Other | 25 | 5.0 |
| Occupation | Private employee | 170 | 34.0 |
| | Government officer | 160 | 32.0 |
| | Student | 80 | 16.0 |
| | Business owner | 50 | 10.0 |
| | Other | 40 | 8.0 |
| Travel Companion | Family | 230 | 46.0 |
| | Friends | 125 | 25.0 |
| | Partner | 105 | 21.0 |
| | Solo | 40 | 8.0 |
| Regional Distribution | Northern Thailand | 100 | 20.0 |
| | Northeastern Thailand | 100 | 20.0 |
| | Central Thailand | 100 | 20.0 |
| | Southern Thailand | 100 | 20.0 |
| | Greater Bangkok | 100 | 20.0 |

As presented in Table 1, 56.4 percent of respondents were female and 43.6 percent were male. The average age of participants was 32.10 years with a standard deviation of 9.40 years, as reported in Table 2, indicating that the sample was predominantly composed of young and middle aged adults. Regarding marital status, 68.0 percent were single, 27.0 percent were married, and 5.0 percent reported other status categories, suggesting a largely independent and mobile travel segment.

Occupationally, private sector employees constituted the largest group at 34.0 percent, followed by government officers at 32.0 percent, as shown in Table 1. Students represented 16.0 percent of the sample, business owners accounted for 10.0 percent, and 8.0 percent reported other occupations. This distribution reflects a working age population with stable income sources capable of sustaining domestic travel.

**Table 2.** Travel Frequency and Duration Statistics

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age (years) | 32.10 | 9.40 | 18 | 65 |
| Travel frequency per year | 5.70 | 4.60 | 1 | 30 |
| Average trip duration (days) | 3.20 | 1.70 | 1 | 10 |

Travel behavior patterns further contextualize the respondent profile. As summarized in Table 2, respondents reported an average domestic travel frequency of 5.70 trips per year with a standard deviation of 4.60, indicating moderate travel activity during the recovery period. The average trip duration was 3.20 days with a standard deviation of 1.70, suggesting that most domestic trips were short to medium stays. In terms of travel companions, family travel was the most common at 46.0 percent, followed by travel with friends at 25.0 percent, travel with partners at 21.0 percent, and solo travel at 8.0 percent, as displayed in Table 1. The predominance of socially oriented travel is consistent with the relational characteristics of domestic tourism.

To ensure balanced geographic representation, respondents were evenly distributed across five major regions of Thailand, with each region contributing 20.0 percent of the sample, as shown in Table 1. This equal regional allocation enhances the generalizability of findings within the national domestic tourism context.

Overall, the demographic and travel characteristics reported in Tables 1 and 2 indicate an active domestic travel segment characterized by moderate travel frequency, socially oriented travel arrangements, and relatively short trip durations. These contextual features provide an appropriate foundation for examining the relational exchange mechanisms underlying domestic travel continuity intention.

## Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were examined prior to testing the measurement and structural models. This step provides preliminary insight into the central tendency of each construct and the strength of interrelationships among variables.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix (N = 500)

| Construct | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Travel Motivation | 3.98 | 0.56 | 1 | | | |
| 2. Tourist Trust | 4.05 | 0.57 | 0.65** | 1 | | |
| 3. Tourist Loyalty | 4.06 | 0.60 | 0.56** | 0.64** | 1 | |
| 4. Travel Continuity Intention | 4.08 | 0.65 | 0.63** | 0.71** | 0.76** | 1 |

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

As reported in Table 3, all core constructs exhibit relatively high mean scores on the five point Likert scale. Travel motivation recorded a mean of 3.98 with a standard deviation of 0.56, indicating that respondents generally reported moderate to high motivational alignment with domestic travel during the recovery period. Tourist trust demonstrated a slightly higher mean of 4.05 with a standard deviation of 0.57, suggesting strong confidence in domestic destinations and service providers. Tourist loyalty also reflected a high level with a mean of 4.06 and a standard deviation of 0.60. Travel continuity intention showed the highest mean value at 4.08 with a standard deviation of 0.65, indicating a generally strong intention among respondents to continue domestic travel.

The correlation matrix presented in Table 3 shows significant positive associations among all constructs at the 0.01 significance level. Travel motivation is positively correlated with trust (r = 0.65), loyalty (r = 0.56), and continuity intention (r = 0.63). Tourist trust is positively associated with loyalty (r = 0.64) and continuity intention (r = 0.71). Loyalty demonstrates the strongest correlation with continuity intention (r = 0.76), suggesting that relational attachment may function as a central predictor of sustained domestic travel behavior.

To assess potential multicollinearity, inter construct correlations were examined against commonly accepted thresholds. No correlation coefficient exceeded 0.80, indicating that multicollinearity is unlikely to pose a concern in subsequent structural modeling. The highest correlation observed was between loyalty and continuity intention (r = 0.76), which remains within acceptable limits for discriminant validity assessment.

Overall, the descriptive and correlational findings provide preliminary support for the proposed relational framework. The consistently positive and moderate to strong correlations among motivation, trust, loyalty, and continuity intention align with social exchange theory and justify proceeding to measurement and structural model evaluation.

## Measurement Model

Before testing the structural relationships, the measurement model was evaluated to ensure reliability and validity of the latent constructs. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling procedures.

**Table 4.** Reliability and Convergent Validity Assessment

| Construct | Items | Factor Loadings | Cronbach Alpha | Composite Reliability | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Travel Motivation | 4 | 0.72–0.84 | 0.86 | 0.88 | 0.60 |
| Tourist Trust | 4 | 0.75–0.87 | 0.89 | 0.91 | 0.66 |
| Tourist Loyalty | 4 | 0.74–0.86 | 0.90 | 0.92 | 0.68 |
| Travel Continuity Intention | 4 | 0.70–0.85 | 0.88 | 0.90 | 0.63 |

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach alpha and composite reliability. As shown in Table 4, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach alpha values ranged from 0.86 to 0.91, indicating strong internal consistency. Composite reliability values ranged from 0.88 to 0.92, further confirming adequate reliability of the measurement scales.

These results suggest that the items measuring travel motivation, tourist trust, tourist loyalty, and travel continuity intention consistently capture their respective underlying constructs.

Convergent validity was evaluated by examining standardized factor loadings and average variance extracted. All standardized factor loadings were statistically significant and exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.60, ranging from 0.70 to 0.87, as reported in Table 4.

Average variance extracted values ranged from 0.60 to 0.69, surpassing the minimum threshold of 0.50, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. These findings confirm satisfactory convergent validity.

**Table 5.** Discriminant Validity Assessment (Fornell Larcker Criterion)

| Construct | Motivation | Trust | Loyalty | Continuity Intention |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Motivation | 0.77 | | | |
| Trust | 0.65 | 0.81 | | |
| Loyalty | 0.56 | 0.64 | 0.82 | |
| Continuity Intention | 0.63 | 0.71 | 0.76 | 0.79 |

Note: Diagonal values represent the square root of AVE.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell and Larcker criterion. As presented in Table 5, the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct exceeded the corresponding inter construct correlations. This indicates that each latent variable shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs in the model.

Additionally, no inter construct correlation exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.85, further supporting discriminant validity.

Collectively, the reliability and validity results demonstrate that the measurement model is robust and appropriate for subsequent structural model evaluation.

## Structural Model Assessment

Following confirmation of satisfactory measurement properties, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships among travel motivation, tourist trust, tourist loyalty, and travel continuity intention.

The overall goodness of fit of the structural model was assessed using multiple fit indices commonly recommended in structural equation modeling literature (Hair et al., 2019).

The chi square statistic was 41.28 with 12 degrees of freedom, resulting in a chi square to degrees of freedom ratio of 3.44. Although the chi square value was statistically significant, this result is expected in models with moderate sample sizes. The ratio remained within the acceptable threshold below 5, indicating adequate model fit.

The comparative fit index was 0.985 and the Tucker Lewis index was 0.978, both exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.95, suggesting excellent incremental fit. The root mean square error of approximation was 0.068, which falls below the recommended maximum of 0.08, indicating acceptable parsimony fit. The standardized root mean square residual was 0.021, well below the 0.08 cutoff, demonstrating strong residual fit.

Collectively, these indices indicate that the proposed relational pathway model provides a satisfactory representation of the observed data.

The standardized path coefficients, t values, and significance levels are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Structural Model Results

| Hypothesis | Path | Standardized β | t value | p value | Result |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| H1 | Motivation → Trust | 0.62 | 10.84 | < 0.001 | Supported |
| H2 | Motivation → Loyalty | 0.24 | 3.96 | < 0.001 | Supported |
| H3 | Motivation → Continuity Intention | 0.18 | 3.21 | 0.001 | Supported |
| H4 | Trust → Loyalty | 0.46 | 7.85 | < 0.001 | Supported |
| H5 | Trust → Continuity Intention | 0.29 | 5.44 | < 0.001 | Supported |
| H6 | Loyalty → Continuity Intention | 0.48 | 8.92 | < 0.001 | Supported |

$R^2$ Trust = 0.38; $R^2$ Loyalty = 0.49; $R^2$ Continuity Intention = 0.64

Travel motivation demonstrated a significant positive effect on tourist trust (β = 0.62, t = 10.84, p < 0.001), supporting H1. This finding indicates that higher levels of motivational alignment are associated with stronger trust perceptions in domestic tourism contexts.

Travel motivation also exerted a significant positive influence on tourist loyalty (β = 0.24, t = 3.96, p < 0.001), supporting H2. This suggests that motivational fulfillment contributes to attitudinal commitment toward domestic destinations.

The direct effect of travel motivation on travel continuity intention was positive and significant (β = 0.18, t = 3.21, p = 0.001), supporting H3. This indicates that motivation independently contributes to sustained domestic travel intention beyond relational mediators.

Tourist trust had a significant positive effect on tourist loyalty (β = 0.46, t = 7.85, p < 0.001), supporting H4. This confirms that trust strengthens relational attachment and commitment.

Trust also directly influenced travel continuity intention (β = 0.29, t = 5.44, p < 0.001), supporting H5. This finding highlights the role of trust as a risk reduction mechanism that directly shapes behavioral intention.

Finally, tourist loyalty demonstrated the strongest direct effect on travel continuity intention (β = 0.48, t = 8.92, p < 0.001), supporting H6. This result indicates that loyalty functions as the proximal determinant of continued domestic travel behavior.

The structural model explained 38 percent of the variance in tourist trust, 49 percent of the variance in tourist loyalty, and 64 percent of the variance in travel continuity intention. The relatively high explained variance for continuity intention suggests that the relational exchange framework provides strong predictive power in the domestic tourism recovery context.

## Mediation Analysis

To examine the proposed relational mediation mechanism, indirect effects were tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and bias corrected 95 percent confidence intervals. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant when the confidence interval did not include zero.

Table 7. Bootstrapping Results for Hypothesized Indirect Effects

| Hypothesis | Indirect Path | β | 95% CI | p value | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H7 | Trust → Loyalty → Continuity | 0.22 | [0.16, 0.30] | < 0.001 | Supported |
| H8 | Motivation → Trust → Loyalty → Continuity | 0.14 | [0.09, 0.20] | < 0.001 | Supported |

H7 proposed that tourist loyalty mediates the relationship between tourist trust and travel continuity intention. As reported in Table 7, the indirect effect of trust on continuity intention through loyalty is positive and statistically significant (β = 0.22, 95% CI [0.16, 0.30], p < 0.001). The direct path from trust to continuity intention remains significant (β = 0.29, p < 0.001), indicating partial mediation. This finding suggests that trust contributes to domestic travel continuity both directly, by reducing perceived risk and enhancing confidence, and indirectly, by strengthening relational commitment through loyalty. Thus, H7 is supported.

H8 proposed a sequential mediation mechanism in which travel motivation influences travel continuity intention through tourist trust and tourist loyalty. The bootstrapping results presented in Table 7 demonstrate that the indirect chain effect of motivation → trust → loyalty → continuity intention is positive and statistically significant (β = 0.14, 95% CI [0.09, 0.20], p < 0.001). Because the direct effect of motivation on continuity intention remains significant (β = 0.18, p = 0.001), the mediation is classified as complementary partial mediation. This result supports the social exchange argument that motivation initiates relational engagement, trust stabilizes the exchange under uncertainty, loyalty consolidates commitment, and continuity intention emerges as the behavioral manifestation of this relational sequence. Accordingly, H8 is supported.

The mediation findings collectively reinforce the theoretical positioning of continuity intention as a relational outcome rather than a purely motivational response. The significant indirect paths reported in Table 7 confirm that domestic travel continuity is shaped by layered relational mechanisms consistent with social exchange theory.

## Discussion

The present study examined domestic travel continuity intention during Thailand's tourism recovery period through a relational exchange framework. The findings provide strong empirical support for the theorized pathway in which travel motivation initiates relational engagement, trust stabilizes the exchange under uncertainty, loyalty consolidates commitment, and continuity intention emerges as the behavioral outcome. This structure is consistent with commitment trust theory in relationship marketing, which positions trust and commitment as central mechanisms driving sustained relational behavior (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). By situating revisit intention within a sequential relational process rather than as a direct behavioral reaction, the study advances a more mechanism based explanation of post crisis domestic tourism behavior.

The significant positive relationship between travel motivation and tourist trust suggests that motivational alignment functions as an early evaluative cue for credibility and reliability in domestic destinations. This finding resonates with recent tourism research indicating that in post pandemic environments, travelers evaluate destinations not only based on leisure aspirations but also on perceived safety assurance and service transparency (Shin, Nicolau, and Kang, 2022). Motivation in recovery contexts appears to encompass both psychological restoration and reassurance seeking. When destinations satisfy these expectations, they foster confidence and reduce perceived vulnerability, consistent with social exchange theory's emphasis on reward cost evaluation (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Tourist trust demonstrated both a direct and indirect influence on travel continuity intention. The direct effect confirms the role of trust as a risk reduction mechanism, particularly relevant in post crisis travel settings characterized by heightened uncertainty. This aligns with recent findings that trust significantly predicts travel intention in contexts shaped by health risk perception and institutional

credibility (Chou et al., 2022). At the same time, the mediation results indicate that trust also strengthens loyalty, which in turn enhances continuity intention. This layered influence reinforces the argument that trust stabilizes relational expectations and fosters commitment, rather than merely influencing behavior independently.

Tourist loyalty emerged as the strongest direct predictor of continuity intention. This finding supports prior tourism research demonstrating that loyalty remains the most proximal determinant of revisit behavior, even under shifting environmental conditions (So et al., 2020). In recovery contexts, loyalty reflects more than habitual repetition. It represents affective attachment and commitment developed through positive relational exchange. The strong effect of loyalty on continuity intention suggests that domestic tourism resilience may depend less on promotional intensity and more on the depth of relational bonds formed between tourists and destinations.

The sequential mediation pathway further clarifies the mechanism underlying domestic travel continuity. The significant chain effect from motivation to trust to loyalty to continuity intention confirms that motivational drivers alone are insufficient to guarantee sustained behavior. Instead, motivation must translate into trust, trust must evolve into loyalty, and loyalty must culminate in continuity intention. This process oriented understanding is consistent with contemporary tourism resilience scholarship, which emphasizes behavioral rebuilding and relational capital rather than short term demand recovery (Prayag, 2020; Gössling, Scott, and Hall, 2021). The findings therefore extend social exchange theory into post crisis tourism by demonstrating that exchange processes unfold in structured stages under conditions of uncertainty.

The study contributes theoretically by integrating social exchange logic with recovery phase tourism behavior. First, it reconceptualizes travel continuity intention as a relational outcome embedded within sequential exchange mechanisms. Second, it demonstrates that trust retains a dual role in post crisis contexts, functioning both as a direct stabilizer and as a precursor to loyalty. Third, it provides empirical evidence from an emerging Southeast Asian tourism economy, thereby addressing calls for broader geographic representation in tourism behavior research.

From a managerial perspective, the findings imply that domestic tourism recovery strategies should prioritize relational architecture rather than solely promotional incentives. Motivation based campaigns may stimulate initial interest, but sustained continuity depends on reinforcing trust and cultivating loyalty. Destination management organizations should therefore institutionalize visible safety standards, transparent communication, and consistent service delivery to strengthen trust formation. At the same time, loyalty building initiatives should move beyond price incentives toward experiential quality, emotional engagement, and community integration. Strengthening relational commitment may be more effective in sustaining domestic tourism demand than short term financial subsidies alone.

Despite these contributions, the study has limitations. The cross sectional design restricts causal inference and does not capture dynamic changes in relational perceptions over time. Future research should employ longitudinal approaches to examine how motivation, trust, and loyalty evolve as recovery stabilizes. Additionally, incorporating moderating variables such as perceived risk, travel constraints, or institutional trust in government may further refine understanding of domestic tourism resilience mechanisms.

Overall, the findings confirm that domestic travel continuity in post crisis contexts is fundamentally relational. Motivation initiates the exchange, trust stabilizes it, loyalty consolidates it, and continuity intention reflects the culmination of these interconnected processes.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine domestic travel continuity intention during Thailand's tourism recovery period through a relational exchange framework grounded in social exchange theory. The findings demonstrate that domestic travel continuity is not merely a direct outcome of motivational drivers but rather the culmination of sequential relational processes. Travel motivation initiates engagement, tourist trust stabilizes exchange under conditions of uncertainty, tourist loyalty consolidates

commitment, and continuity intention emerges as the behavioral manifestation of sustained relational value.

All hypothesized direct relationships were supported. Travel motivation positively influenced trust, loyalty, and continuity intention. Tourist trust strengthened loyalty and directly enhanced continuity intention. Tourist loyalty emerged as the strongest predictor of domestic travel continuity. Furthermore, mediation analysis confirmed that loyalty partially mediates the relationship between trust and continuity intention, and that trust and loyalty sequentially mediate the relationship between motivation and continuity intention. These findings validate the theoretical positioning of continuity intention as a relational outcome shaped by layered exchange mechanisms.

The study contributes to tourism recovery literature by extending social exchange theory into post crisis domestic travel behavior. It reframes revisit intention as the endpoint of a structured relational pathway rather than a standalone behavioral decision. By empirically demonstrating the importance of trust and loyalty in shaping sustained domestic mobility, the study underscores the role of relational capital in tourism resilience.

Practically, the results suggest that domestic tourism recovery strategies should move beyond short term promotional incentives and instead focus on strengthening relational foundations. Destinations that consistently fulfill motivational expectations, build credible trust, and cultivate loyalty are more likely to sustain domestic travel demand in the long term.

In conclusion, domestic tourism resilience in post crisis environments is fundamentally relational. Sustained travel continuity depends on how effectively destinations convert motivational engagement into trust based confidence and loyalty driven commitment.

### Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### Data Availability
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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